

Never Mind the Minimum, Let's Have the Maximum! Abolish the Wages System!

Instead of the conservative motto "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" the workers ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary slogan "Abolition of the wages system!" *Karl Marx Wages, Prices and Profit (1865)*

The minimum wage came in on April 1st. It is obviously the Labour Party's April Fool joke. But for those of us trying to get by on crappy wages it's no laughing matter. Labour is no defender of our class - they make that clear every time they get into power. It's hardly a shock to see them agree to a miserable £3.60 an hour whilst they cut benefits for unemployed and disabled workers. At £3.60 an hour you get a take home pay [for a 40 hour week] of not much over £100. Double that rate is still poverty wages. It is a terrible indictment of the system that, even at this pathetic rate, 2 million workers will actually get a small benefit from the minimum wage. Many more will not, thanks to all the exceptions granted to the bosses. Despite all the promises about a "High wage economy" made by Labour in the election campaign this new minimum makes sure that the gap between rich and poor widens. Even the Government admitted that 12 million people in Britain today live in dire poverty.

World Capitalism is in Crisis

The main reason why real wage levels are falling is because the capitalist system world-wide is in deep crisis. Since the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s the bosses and their politicians have found no solution to it. They can't stop massive parts of the world sinking into economic collapse as the "Tiger" economies in Asia have done. They can't stop famine and starvation as in Korea or Africa. In fact the only guarantee is that more and more of the world's population live on the edge of existence as one third already do. And their only solution is war, as we've seen with Yugoslavia and Iraq. Capitalism is failing and the Blairs and the Browns can't do anything about it except blame us for its failure and make us pay for it.

We have to fight together against all their attacks. This is obvious. But there is no point kidding ourselves that this can be done through the capitalist parliament. Nor can we expect the trades unions to defend us.

Unions Defend Capital Not Workers

Unions were once workers' organisations. But even then trades unions limited themselves to trying to negotiate a better deal within the system. As Karl Marx famously said unions *generally fail by limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is the ultimate abolition of the wages system.* *Karl Marx Wages, Prices and Profit (1865)*

Today abolishing the system is the **only realistic goal** workers can have. World capitalism is now thirty years into the longest crisis it has ever faced. That capitalism is more centralised than ever in the hands of a financial ruling class. There is no way we can fight them section by section or even country by country. All they do is shift investment from one area where workers fight to another where they don't. When unemployment has destroyed the will of workers to fight the finance capitalists move investment back. The way the unions split us up actually helps the capitalist state (John Monks talks about a minimum wage "the country" can afford). Unions today don't even back their own members in struggle (ask the Liverpool Dockers or Sheffield Housing Benefit workers what support they got from the TGWU and Unison central office!). The TUC campaign for a better minimum wage is safe ground for the bosses. It is absolutely no threat to them. If the working class is to put up a real fight we have to learn how to organise for ourselves once again.

International Political Organisation Needed

Above all we have to organise politically not just in Britain but internationally. Today we in the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party are building up an international political organisation which takes into account the lessons of past mistakes and failures so we can better defend ourselves in future. This won't mean working for £3.60 an hour but working internationally for the abolition of the wages system altogether. Our fight is for a world where everyone can work or be looked after when they can't. A world where work means a useful contribution to satisfying real human needs (and not producing weapons and other useless commodities). It will be a world run and controlled by the workers themselves, a world in which participation is real and permanent not through putting a cross on a ballot paper every five years. The alternative is the steady decline of the capitalist system into a new barbarism. We really have a world to win! Join us!

Public Meeting Newcastle

What is the Working Class Response to the Yugoslav Crisis?

3.00
Saturday April 10th
Royal Station Hotel
Neville St
(next to Central Station)
All Welcome

NATO Bombings of Yugoslavia = War on the Working Class

The tragedy of Kosovo is made even more ghastly by the lies that surround it. The NATO propaganda machine makes out that the "ethnic cleansing" of Albanians had already begun when they started bombing. But the truth is that the bombings in Yugoslavia have provoked an attempt by the Serb government to create "facts on the ground" as the Israelis say whenever they establish new Jewish settlements in Palestine. If the Israelis can indulge in barbarism why not the Serbs?

The NATO bombings in Yugoslavia cannot be understood as a single event. They are part of a continuing story of contemporary capitalism. All the features that make up the horrors of life under this decaying social system are present. The first is the capitalist crisis. The crisis of accumulation first arrived in the early 1970s. At first it brought a new wave of class struggle but by the 1980s the stagnation of the world economy led to a new level of capital concentration. Western states were forced to deregulate and privatise their economies in a competitive effort to increase inward investment. In Eastern Europe, where the state was both main banker and main capitalist the crisis brought economic ruin. This provoked the collapse of the both the USSR and the old Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

The crisis of Yugoslavia in the late 1980s also provoked a wave of strikes. Hundreds of thousands of workers were on strike by 1990. This was when the local ruling class played the nationalist card. Tudjman in Croatia, Izatbegovic in Bosnia and Milosevic in Serbia may have all been rivals but they had a common purpose - to drown the class struggle in "ethnic" conflict.

Today the conflict is returning to where it really began in Kosovo. It was here in 1987 that Milosevic first proclaimed to the Serb minority that "You are Serbs. No-one will ever beat you". Kosovo immediately lost its statute of autonomy. Something the Albanian-speaking politicians waited for the US to restore once they had "solved" the Bosnian crisis. But at Dayton Kosovo was not mentioned (in fact the leader of the moderate Kosovans, Ibrahim Rugova has been ignored by the US throughout all this). As we said at the time this was only another reason to see why Dayton was fake peace. After Dayton the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) sprang up on the basis of German finance. US military attachés benignly supervised the passage of arms from Albania into Kosovo. The US (under its guise as the United Nations) then ordered the Serbs to withdraw their forces from Kosovo. This they did only to see the KLA occupy most of rural Kosovo. The Serb reconquest with all its brutalities is the consequence of all this manoeuvring.

So we can forget all the hypocritical talk about "bombing for peace" or a NATO "humanitarian mission". The bombing has only increased the sum of human misery of both Serbs and Kosovans. In every sense this is a war of a small

minority of the nationalist ruling class on both sides who can easily terrorise each other's "supporters". Most Serbs and Kosovans don't want this war. This is why the KLA has all but vanished - Kosovan youth don't want to fight for it. This is why, on the Serb side 500,000 Serbian youth have left Yugoslavia in the last decade rather than fight for Serb nationalism. In Kosovo itself though the rival gangs can commit atrocities and thus whip up tribal hatred as they did in Bosnia. But we should not forget that imperialist interference made their actions possible and has thus increased, not diminished that suffering.

The Stakes for the NATO Powers

So much for the story. Why are NATO so interested in a place of such minor economic significance as Kosovo? The answer lies in the uncertainty of the great power line-up since the end of the Cold War. In truth none of the so-called "Great Powers" has a perfectly clear understanding of what their main interests are. The US is demonstrating to all its potential rivals (particularly in Europe) that it remains the one military power that they all have to do business with. They all know that **not** being involved would leave the field open to their rivals. At the bottom of it all lies economic rivalry for control of the world's resources. Kosovo might be a good distance from the oil fields of the Caucasus (where a ferocious commercial rivalry is going on) but what happens in Kosovo (Serbia is a traditional ally of Russia going back to the last century) will be a warning to Russia that NATO has the power to strike close to its territory. There are now NATO troops in Poland and 10,000 currently in Macedonia.

This is why the crisis in Yugoslavia is potentially more dangerous than that in the Gulf. The Gulf Crisis was basically about a former Western ally, Iraq, being put in its place when it tried to become a regional power in its own right. Milosevic is an elected leader (despite all NATO propaganda about him being another dictator) who was only elected by playing the Greater Serbia card. He has not attacked another state as Iraq did. More significantly he is also a protégé of Russia. NATO has now demonstrated that if the alliance means anything in a post-Cold War Europe it is going to be the vanguard of US imperialism in Europe and Central Asia.

The Internationalist Position

Our position is that of Karl Marx. *Workers have no country.* We must therefore be quite clear that we give no support to any side. We do not play stupid games such as giving "critical" support to either the Kosovo "national liberation" (which, as we have shown, is only the product of imperialist manoeuvring) or the Serbs (on the basis of their supposed status as the victims of Western imperialism). Nor do we only condemn the Great Powers because they are more powerful. None of the forces offers anything progressive *continued overleaf*

Iraq: Bombings Show Imperialist Rivalries

The December bombings and the continuing confrontations over the "no-fly" zones in Iraq have signalled once again that the USA and Britain are alone in carrying out a policy of besieging Baghdad. In some ways that is why the bombings took place. The USA (with Britain hanging to its coat-tails) wanted to demonstrate its military power in the face of European Union and Russian and Chinese opposition.

The bombings are not because Saddam is a dictator or even less for ethical reasons. They are carried out for very material questions; large economic interests such as the control and extraction of financial income and control of primary products, specifically oil.

It has thrown into relief the shadow-boxing which passes for current imperialist rivalry. So shadowy has it become that the British Government has not even been supported by its own press. The Blair Government claimed that the US and British forces in the Gulf did not need a further mandate from the United Nations to bomb Baghdad. Nearly every other major power disagreed with this. The pretence that the US and British are acting as policemen for "the international community" was thus exposed in all its

hollowness. The Blair Government, in attempting to combat the widespread cynicism at home pulled out all the stops to remind the world why Britain and the US should bomb a country which was not at war with anyone and which had been thoroughly pasted less than nine years ago.

The USA and Britain did not wait for a UN resolution to bomb Iraq because they know they would not have got one. Russia and China would have vetoed and other powers would have called for more time. After all the UN had two reports in front of it, one from UNSCOM which highlighted lack of co-operation by Iraq, another from the Atomic Energy Authority which stated that Iraq had complied with their demands. As we now know UNSCOM is just a front for US imperialism as it contained American spies who passed on satellite information to UNSCOM as well as ensuring that it was more combative in demanding access to Iraqi establishments. We now have the testimony of a US UNSCOM inspector to say that Iraq was complying with the inspections but that it was the CIA which provoked last December's bombings.

The USA and Britain are the only two

countries with naval forces in the Gulf. These are also the only two Western countries who would benefit from a higher oil price (since they have their own sales whilst their rivals in Europe and Japan have none). At the current price it is not worth drilling in the North Sea or Texas (where many wells have been shut down). The crisis of world capitalism has undermined any attempt of the US and Britain to maintain prices. As industrial production stagnates and falls the need for oil is diminishing over a whole range of processes. Although oil is not the only game the US and Britain are playing in this vital area for imperialism it does remain significant. The continuing effort to prevent Iraq putting oil on the world market was underlined by the bombing of Iraq's main oil terminal at Basra and more recently by the main Iraqi oil pipeline.

The bombing of Baghdad was a failure for both the US and Britain. Their strategy of giving the Iraq population a hard time so that there might be a military coup, which would get rid of Saddam without risking a revolution, is in tatters. Saddam is still there after nine years of increasing economic privation. According to Dennis Halliday, the former UN assistant General secretary responsible for humanitarian relief in Iraq, the sanctions against Iraq are costing the lives of five thousand children a month (He resigned because he rejects the US Government propaganda that this starvation is a provocation by the Iraqi regime)

Now the USA and Britain are in a cleft stick. Saddam, emboldened by his relative success, has begun to challenge the US in the "no-fly zones" as well as put out feelers to other Arab powers (with talk of "apologising for past mistakes"). Increasingly the US is ruling through naked power and only the UK Government which has the same interests in the Middle East prevents its total isolation. The situation is now even more volatile and the possibilities of further violence provoked by the US' presence in the Gulf are more rather than less likely.

In this situation our position is the same. This is an inter-imperialist struggle in which the working class has no interest. Increasingly war is capitalism's ultimate offering. As barbarism multiplies around the planet we have to fight against war, against imperialism and for the only system which can put an end to this misery - communism.

Aurora

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Imperialism Goes Bananas

Overshadowed by the NATO/US bombing of Kosovo and Albania is the trade dispute between the United States and the European Union. The US bourgeoisie, ever on the offensive, has moved to protect US steel against cheaper imports from Japan and Russia and to gain greater access to European markets on behalf of banana and beef producers. It is no accident that the US is launching a bombing campaign against Serbia right after the creation of the Euro. They both have a common root in the working of US imperialism. The aggressive pursuit of ever greater markets can only intensify as it becomes harder to find outlets for exports. The obvious connection is that US imperialism can only pursue an aggressively self-interested policy, any veneer of rhetoric whether that of free trade or humanitarian crises can only be a fig leaf covering the true intentions of the US state.

The trade dispute with Japan and Russia last year culminated in a drop in steel exports to the US. Ironically, the government that talks the loudest when it

comes to telling other governments to end their state-capitalism rushes to the defence of US state capital, US Steel. This was followed by the government pursuing a trade war with the EU supposedly because of the EU's trade preference for bananas from the Caribbean and Africa and their refusal to purchase US hormone laden beef. Another irony is that the only government in Europe to oppose the EU ban on treated beef was the UK, home of the original mad cow disease scare. The World Trade Organisation, created to mediate trade disputes is useless, far from being a step towards newer improved trade regime it is a symptom of worsening trade relations, having been created to hold together a system that is falling apart.

**"Beef its what's for Dinner"
- or else!**

US beef producers claimed they were losing \$500 million annually because of the EU ban while Banana agribusiness

giants like Chiquita claim to be losing \$520 million annually even though they never really had access to those markets in the first place. The EU reacted to the trade dispute initiated by the US government by bringing a suit to the WTO. Ultimately, it is no surprise that the US would choose to bypass the WTO and impose 100% tariffs on selected European goods as each state has to vie for the best terms of trade it can get. The bourgeoisie of the US has to use its power to force the best terms of trade it can get from other factions of the global bourgeoisie while it still has the power to do so.

It is up to the Europeans. They have to bring their trade regime into conformity.
Ambassador Rita Hayes

Just fill in the blanks and you have US government policy on everything:
It is up to the (name of region or nationality here). They have to bring their (policy not favoured by US bourgeoisie here) into conformity.

EU-US Banana Split

Of course there is much more at stake than simply bananas and beef. The economy of the UK and the US are starting to show signs of weakening. The forcible opening of markets is absolutely necessary if the ruling class in the US is to continue to keep its head above the turbulent waters of international finance, trade and diplomacy. The NATO bombing is the logical military expression of US aim at dominating its "NATO coalition partners". The US has to use its power to dictate the most favourable terms of trade at the same time using a NATO military action to keep the countries of Europe in line. Ultimately, economic tensions between Europe and the US will result in conflicts beyond trade disputes. Workers in the US do not benefit from this, the trade conflict can only make things worse in a world economy that is already fragile the unions like the Steel Workers are not defenders of our jobs but the defenders of state capital, negotiators of wage freezes and layoffs. Finally, workers cannot benefit from any policy of protection of their "own" national capital. For those who would be revolutionaries such a compromise would not merely be a tactical compromise but a compromise of principle. **AS**
From Internationalist Notes (USA)

What We Stand For

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): COMMUNISM.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for

us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve - the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

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NATO Bombings of Yugoslavia

continued from first page
for humanity.

This is a war by a decaying rotten system against the working class everywhere. We offer our solidarity, as we do in every imperialist conflict, to those Serb and Albanian workers who try to organise against the war. We do everything in our, as yet, limited power to weaken the war machines that emanate from the states where we find ourselves. At the moment we share the impotence of the rest of the working class when faced with a war which we have not been asked to express an opinion nor have been asked to materially take part in. This will not stop us doing what we can to ensure that wider and wider layers of workers understand what is going on.

The choice is becoming starker. Either capitalism gives us more war, more starvation, more massacres, in short, more barbarism or else an international working class revolution puts an end to capitalism and imperialism once and for all.

For a more developed view see *From Titoism to Barbarism* in **International Communist** 11.